

## **Aruba's First Immigrants**

Aruba's rich multicultural past is mostly reflected in our traditions and the friendliness of our people. What began as a fishing and farming outpost for the Ameridians, has changed hands between the Spanish, English and Dutch throughout the centuries, and is now a diverse constituent of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Here is a short description of our first immigrants:

### Pre-Columbia Period (1150-1500)

Tradition, rather than authentic history informs us that Aruba was first settled by tribes of mild Arawaks who came to the island by large canoes and small sailboats from the nearby coasts of South America. Very little is known of these early inhabitants, except that they were farmers and fishermen who used earthen vessels, stone hatchets, and sabers of hardwood. It is also known that they buried their dead mostly in sitting positions in vases of hard baked clay.

The Pre-Columbia period was when the Indians lived around our islands. They were the first known inhabitants on the island of Aruba and were the Caiquetio Indians of the Arawak tribe who came from Venezuela. Originally they were living in Colombia, but the continuous attacks by the Carib tribe forced them to move to Paraguana, Venezuela. The Caribs were fierce, warlike, cannibalistic people who lived by hunting and fighting rather than by settled occupation. When the Caiquetio Indians thought they were at ease in Venezuela, the Carib Indians insisted in chasing them, and again after several attacks, many of them came to Aruba and met several others who were already living in harmony with one another in Savaneta and Santa Cruz. Later on when the Spaniards came, the Indians spreaded all around the island. From the relics dated 2500 BC found on various sites around the island, it was proven that a small group of Indians lived mostly by fishing. It was calculated that 50 or 60 lived in small groups. History tells us that the last Indian, Nicolaas Pycclas died in Savaneta in 1862.

### Spanish Period (1500-1636)

The Europeans learned of Aruba when Amerigo Vespucci and Alonso de Ojeda discovered Aruba in 1499. As we all know Alonso de Ojeda discovered Aruba on August 9, 1499. In 1508 he was appointed as the first governor of Spain in Aruba, as part of the "Nueva Andalucia". With the arrival of the Spanish, the culture and sustainable society terminated the period of the Indians. At that time the Spanish and 300 Indians were living at Commandeursbaai in Savaneta. The Spanish used the bay to enter our island. They did not come to the ABC islands to do business, although it seems that they came to look for precious metals. When they did not find any, they declared the islands as "useless islands". They brought lots of animals, especially goats for their own consumption, reason why they called the island "goat island" and the island was like a big ranch. They also brought Christianity.

### Dutch First Period (1636-1805)

Since 1634, the Dutch (with their leader Johan van Walbeeck) started to visit the ABC islands, they met the Indians and Spaniards, living in Aruba. The Dutch deported the small population of the Arawak and Spaniards to the continent. This is how the Dutch colonization of the islands started. The colonization is characterized as conquests, one after the other in the war between the colonization, domain, deportation, killing and slavery.

Because of Aruba's strategic location, the Dutch occupied the island in 1636 in order to protect their salt supply from the South American mainland while also ensuring a naval base in the Caribbean during their Eighty Year's War with Spain.

While the Dutch in Curacao and Bonaire were importing slaves to work on the farm and salt pans, in Aruba they were raising horses and looking for salt for their herring factory, because they could no longer get salt from Portugal and Spain. These two countries stopped all commerce with Holland when it went into the war with England. Reason why they came up with the West Indische Compagnie (WIC).

The eighty year war between Holland and Spain and their allies ended in 1636 and the Spaniards returned Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao to the Dutch who had control under the West Indische Compagnie statutes. The Dutch were interested in the ABC islands and others in the Caribbean and South America. They brought Commanders and others who were ready to do any kind of business. Savaneta then became the first capital and the main port for embarkation and disembarkation. The first commander, Hendrick Martens lived in this area, where they formed a colony. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the office of the administration was situated at Commandeursbaai in Savaneta, but in 1796 governor J.R. Lauffer moved his offices to a small town at Paardenbaai in Oranjestad. This brought with it that the government and its people went to establish at Paardenbaai. At that time, the town was called "Playa", probably named by the Spaniards. They built the Fort Willem II (Fort Zoutman) and in 1830 during one of his visits to Aruba, governor Lauffer named the town as Oranjestad and also the capital of Aruba.

#### English Period (1805-1816)

Aruba was under the domain of the English during 1805-1816. General Francisco de Miranda and a group of 200 soldiers on a trip to liberate Venezuela from Spain, remained several weeks in Aruba in August 1806.

What the English were looking for was principally commerce in Oranjestad. The commerce was based principally on the raising of cattle. They didn't do much change to the island. Most of them worked on the gold mines. We also see that during this period there was more liberty to move between the islands and the opportunity to change islands. Many people from Curacao moved to Aruba and Bonaire.

The war between Holland and England had consequences for Aruba. During the Napoleon era, the English occupied the Dutch colonies. In 1805, the English also visited our island during the Napoleon war when they crossed the sea to come ashore to take a look at the Spaniards. Aruba fell under the domain of the English that lasted until 1816, the year that Holland got back the island from them. The island remained under the domain of Holland ever since.

#### Dutch Second Period (1816-Present)

The Dutch again took power of Aruba from the English in 1816. On January 1, 1986, Aruba got its Status Aparte from the Netherlands Antilles. This achievement is thanks to the courage, diplomatic determination of Mr. Gilberto Francois (Betico) Croes with the political support of other nations like the U.S., Panama, Venezuela, and various European countries. After the Status Aparte, he was named as Aruba's Liberator.

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